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07 May 2015

Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Ward, Simon (2009) 'Berlin as space and place in Wolfgang Koeppen's later texts.', in The politics of place in post-war Germany : essays in literary criticism. Lewiston (N.Y.), Queenston (Ont.), Lampeter [England]: Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 67-84.

Further information on publisher's website:

<http://mellenpress.com/mellenpress.cfm?bookid=7776pc=9>

Publisher's copyright statement:

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CHAPTER 4

Berlin as Space and Place in Wolfgang Koeppen's Later Texts

Simon Ward

Remembering Berlin

The surfeit of recent investigations into Berlin and memory, instigated principally by Brian Ladd's study of *The Ghosts of Berlin*, has paid a tremendous degree of attention to the material 'sites of memory', but less close scrutiny has been afforded to the forms of mediation which are required to activate that memory. On the one hand, the medialization of memory has to be problematized in a more rigorous fashion, and not simply assigned to a pre-linguistic, pre-mediated state as asserted by Dolores Hayden, that Berlin is 'a repository of environmental memory far richer than every verbal code'.¹ On the other, a certain narrative of memory in and of Berlin has become paradigmatic, which sees the first post-war decades as an era of 'repression and forgetting', and which reads the remembrance of an earlier Berlin in the post-unification era as a new phenomenon. Central to this analysis is a reading of the Berlin that predated National Socialism, as this city is invoked as a kind of 'prelapsarian urban utopia' in, for example, the works of Wim Wenders, or the exhibition 'Mythos Berlin' ('The Myth of Berlin') from 1986, to mention two examples which predate the undoubted post-unification fascination with the Weimar era.

Wolfgang Koeppen too was fascinated with Weimar Berlin, but the case of Koeppen is, in many ways, unique, and this is to a large extent due to his unusual autobiography. Wolfgang Koeppen's life and prose centre around Berlin, but always in an eccentric fashion. Koeppen's biographical details were always sketchy, but he did work for a Berlin newspaper in the early 1930s, until he voluntarily left Germany for Holland in 1934. He also worked in Berlin from 1938 onwards within the film industry, as recent biographical research has firmly

¹ Cited in Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 227.

established, despite his many prevarications in interview. After the war, Koeppen lived and wrote in Munich. The setting of his first post-war novel, *Pigeons on the Grass* (*Tauben im Gras*, 1951) is modelled on the Bavarian city, and while Berlin does appear in that book, it is only through the haunted memories of the Jewish actress Henriette. Berlin lies in ruins, and with it the idea of a German-Jewish cultural tradition. Berlin also appears in his 1953 novel, *The Hothouse* (*Das Treibhaus*), but, with the exception of one example to be discussed below, only through the main character Keetenheuve's recollections of his times at the *Volksblatt* newspaper. Berlin functions as a kind of 'identity anchor' in uncertain post-war times in these works, and indeed Koeppen's post-war writings are, as I have suggested elsewhere, shaped by a remembrance of Weimar Berlin and of the cultural tradition associated with that time.² It is only in Koeppen's later (shorter) prose, however, that the city comes to the fore, and while Koeppen's search for a lost self is frequently mediated through a meditation on his childhood in Masuria and Greifswald, a key role is played by Berlin. Since a fundamental given of Koeppen's project is the ultimate inaccessibility of this 'lost self', which is only to be rendered through the masquerading performance of the fictionalizing act, then past Berlin played off against contemporary Berlin is a key strategy: past Berlin, invoked by the spatial markers of a cosmopolitan modernity and modernism, being inaccessible due to the passage of time, the traumas of history; present Berlin being dominated by the spatial structures of the administered world of instrumental reason, which Koeppen, throughout his post-war work, criticizes in a manner informed by Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.³ As Koeppen is one of few post-war German writers to have experienced the 'Weimar Berlin' of the 1920s and 1930s, and to have been shaped by literary modernism and influenced by the modernist climate of the city in those years, his memory of

² Simon Ward, *Negotiating Positions: Literature, Identity and Social Critique in the Works of Wolfgang Koeppen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 99-129.

³ See Otto Lorenz, *Die Öffentlichkeit der Literatur: Fallstudien zu Produktionskontexten und Publikationsstrategien: Wolfgang Koeppen, Peter Handke, Horst-Eberhard Richter* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998).

Berlin is mediated through his own peculiar literary method, informed by a modernist critique of the dogmas of modernity, suspicious of the technocratic homogenization inscribed in modernity as it was analysed by Siegfried Kracauer in his essays, particularly on 'The Mass Ornament' (1926), and indebted to the modernist critiques of modernity composed by Baudelaire and interpreted by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s. This method manifests itself in a particular sensitivity towards urban space, and the interstitial spaces of the urban environment which seemed to provide a place for re-writing the prescriptions of the subject imposed by objective culture and space.

In Koeppen's *The Hothouse* there is a telling scene soon after Keetenheuve, the central character, arrives in the new, provisional capital, Bonn.

A traffic policeman was playacting at being a traffic policeman in the Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. He waved the traffic on down the Bonner Strasse. It swarmed and buzzed and squeaked and honked. [...] What was the scene at the real Potsdamer Platz? A wire enclosure, a new international frontier, the end of the world, the Iron Curtain [...].

Ein Schutzmann spielte Schutzmann in Berlin am Potsdamer Platz. Er gab die Bonner Straße frei. Es wimmelte, es schwirrte, quietschte, klingelte. [...] Was war am wirklichen Potsdamer Platz? Ein Drahtverhau, eine neue und recht kräftige Grenze, ein Weltende, der Eiserne Vorhang.⁴

Bonn, the novel's eponymous artificial hothouse, is only playing at the memory of what it means to be a capital, just as Koeppen's prose recalls, for a sentence, what it means to use the stylistic devices of the 'big city' novel. The reality of Berlin is very different, the Potsdamer Platz already, as it would be for the next forty years, the marker of abstract division not just in Germany, but in the world. Already captured in this brief passage is Koeppen's engagement with the abstract space of

⁴ Wolfgang Koeppen, *The Hothouse*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Granta, 2001), 64. Wolfgang Koeppen, *Gesammelte Werke*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), II, 257. All further references to Koeppen's *Gesammelte Werke* (*Collected Works*) appear as GS. All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

Berlin after 1945, a melancholic recollection of the topographical (and literary) motifs of the Weimar era played off against the frosty realities of the Cold War.

In my earlier work on Wolfgang Koeppen, I demonstrated how his ‘non-conformist’ protagonists’ sense of self is primarily produced through a continual, if elusive negotiation with public contexts rather than trying to escape from them. Koeppen’s protagonists find an ‘anti-structural’ location in a liminal space between discourses.⁵ The city of Berlin as a site of discourse figures as a liminal space particularly in Koeppen’s later texts. To work with a distinction made by Marc Augé, neither the ‘place’ of Berlin past nor the abstract ‘non-place’ of Cold War Berlin’s present can be inhabited, with the result that the protagonist’s sense of self is generated out of the dialogue between past and present, but also situated in the interstitial spaces of Cold War Berlin itself.⁶ In the following analysis of key examples from Koeppen’s oft-neglected post-trilogy prose, I investigate how he plays the image of Berlin as an abstract space off against Berlin imagined as a place, whereby the idea of place is also firmly connected to a historical period now vanished and fundamentally irrecoverable other than through literary fiction. While the act of remembering Berlin past is Koeppen’s primary tactic for undercutting the dominant spatial reality of the present, the act of moving between the regulated spaces of both East and West Berlin is a parallel device for locating the self. Koeppen’s protagonists are between both structures of time and space in Berlin. Strategies of literary fictionalization are the means to elude structure.

Passing through Berlin

In the course of Koeppen’s rail journey to Russia, recorded in his first book of travel prose from 1958, *To Russia and Elsewhere* (*Nach Russland und anderswohin*), the author has to pass through Berlin. This provides him with the opportunity to reflect on the effects of war and rebuilding:

⁵ Ward, *Negotiating Positions*, 1-72.

⁶ Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995).

What remained of Zoo Station, what of the square on Hardenbergstrasse, Kurfürstendamm, Tauentzienstrasse? What remained of Pompeii? The new buildings look like they have been erected after an earthquake.

Was blieb vom Bahnhof Zoo, was von dem Square Hardenbergstrasse, Kurfürstendamm, Tauentzienstraße? Was blieb von Pompeji? Die neuen Bauten sehen wie nach einem Erdbeben errichtet aus. (GS IV, 105)

Koeppen is keen to note the ways in which Americanization (an early form of globalization, perhaps) has affected the spatial practice and experience of the city, at the same time equating such influences with the spread of global capital and the construction of empty homogeneous space:

The waiter directed me, in English, to a seat; there were American breakfast dishes and overseas newspapers, and the men, who ate these dishes and read these newspapers, looked as if they had built the earthquake-proof buildings in the city and now wanted to see what return they were getting on their investment.

Der Kellner wies mir auf Englisch einen Platz an; es gab amerikanische Frühstücksspeisen und überseeische Zeitungen, und die Männer, die diese Speisen aßen und diese Zeitungen lasen, sahen aus, als ob sie die erdbebensicheren Bauten in der Stadt errichtet hätten und nun nach ihrem Gewinn sehen wollten. (GS IV, 106)

The buses, as Koeppen notes, used to run to the 'City', a 'City' that no longer exists as the bus line ends at the Potsdamer Platz. Koeppen, though, acknowledges the presence of a regulated world on both sides of the divide (not yet the Wall): 'Policemen over here, policemen over there'. Yet, in the midst of this administered world, there is the potential of the interstitial space:

The weeds in the middle – a fragment of truth or a chimera? In the burnt-out hall of the Anhalter Station grass is growing and children are screeching; the children shot at one another with water pistols and fell down dead.

Das Unkraut in der Mitte – ein Stück der Wahrheit oder der Chimäre? In der ausgebrannten Halle des Anhalter Bahnhofs

wächst Gras und lärmten Kinder; die Kinder schossen mit
Wasserpistolen aufeinander und fielen tot um. (GS IV, 106)

The space between the regulated spaces is one of truth and illusion, a space of play and nature amidst ruins, whose potential romanticism Koeppen undercuts with his vision of the kinds of games the children (re)play.

In Search of Lost Berlin

Koeppen's next published piece of writing on Berlin appeared in 1965 in a fascinating volume, *Atlas*, edited by Klaus Wagenbach, and containing short pieces by forty-three German authors including Peter Weiss, Günter Kunert and Günter Grass. Koeppen's contribution was entitled 'A Coffeehouse' ('Ein Kaffeehaus'), although it subsequently appeared as 'Romanic Café' ('Romanisches Café') in the prose collection of the same name, returning to its original title in Koeppen's *Collected Works*.

'A Coffeehouse' is the first text to concern itself specifically with the earlier period of Koeppen's life. It is a memory of a place, the site of the bohemian Romanic Café near the Gedächtniskirche in Berlin. The text, which covers three and a half sides in the *Collected Works*, is one long sentence, suggesting the correlation and seamless progression of all events. It narrates the story of the place from the day when the church was built through to the darkest days of the Second World War. What appears to be third-person narration shifts halfway through to reveal a first-person protagonist. The text is not primarily a personal act of recollection, but a detailing of the effects of history and culture on a place, with its concomitant effects on the subject. It recalls the 'gold and iron' which formed the Wilhelmine Reich; the Protestant Prussian militarism; the end of the Great War; the November Revolution; the bohemian set which congregated in the inter-war years; the arrival of the Third Reich and, finally, the destruction of Berlin in the air-raids.

It is during the air-raid described in the text that the narrator meets a publisher in the underground tunnel which is functioning as a shelter:

we were in the purgatory between Wittenbergplatz and the Zoological Garden, a publisher stumbled over gravel and sleepers and said, you will write this, and I thought, I will write this, and knew that I died, in this era, in these years, even if I was not hanged or beaten to death or cremated, above the city blazed, the firestorm raged, I climbed out of the shaft, the tower of the church was shattered, and the Romanic House with the Romanic Café was glowing, as if in victory the Oriflamme of a secret fatherland were alight.

wir waren im Purgatorium zwischen Wittenbergplatz und Zoologischer Garten, ein Verleger stolperte über Schotter und Schwellen und sagte, Sie werden das schreiben, und ich dachte, ich werde es schreiben, und wußte, daß ich starb, in dieser Zeit, in diesen Jahren, auch wenn ich nicht gehenkt würde oder erschlagen oder verbrannt, über uns loderte die Stadt, brauste der Feuersturm, ich stieg aus dem Schacht, der Turm der Kirche war zerschmettert, und das romanische Haus mit dem Romanischen Café glühte, als leuchtete im Sieg die Oriflamme eines geheimen Vaterlandes. (GS III, 168)

The narrator understands himself to be inextricably linked to the fate of the victims around him.⁷ He is witnessing the end of a culture, a culture which he saw flourishing in the Romanic Café, and it is the end of a culture with which he could identify. 'A Coffeehouse' takes up a project that was always at least implicit and often explicit in the post-war novels. Whereas Philipp in *Pigeons on the Grass* is lost in the present and unable to access the past, in this purgatory (a liminal space *par excellence*) a future of sorts is implied. It is the future of 1965, when the narrator must question why he survived. Thus he fulfils his promise to write, to access the past and to maintain a cultural memory.

What are the consequences for a self which knows that it 'died' between 1933 and 1945? Where is there left for it to go? The narrator escapes purgatory

⁷ The moral ambiguities of Koeppen, who was never explicitly a victim, taking up such a position have been discussed with reference to *Jakob Littner's Notes from a Hole in the Ground* (*Jakob Littners Aufzeichnungen aus einem Erdloch*, 1992) by David Basker. Basker, *Chaos, Control and Consistency: The Narrative Vision of Wolfgang Koeppen* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1993), 328. It is a mistake, however, to read this first-person as primarily autobiographical. It is first and foremost culturally representative, as the quotation suggests.

and is left standing in a ruined and fiery landscape. Yet there is a possible positive note. The fire which consumes the Romanic Café may be the purgatorial fire which will cleanse and provide redemption. The task of the 'I' is to carry the 'Oriflamme' (the banner or ensign which is the rallying-point for a struggle) for the secret 'fatherland' (GS III, 168).⁸ Through its resolution, this spectator 'I' is implicitly linked with the narrator 'I', who then does tell the story of the coffeehouse. Those texts which follow on from 'A Coffeehouse' demonstrate the interdependence of these two positions. Writing becomes the act of memory by which a sense of self can be narrated, and Berlin is frequently the place where that self is performed.

Jugend: A Youth in Berlin

Koeppen's 'autobiographical fragment' or 'fragmentary autobiography', *Youth* (*Jugend*) was published in 1976. The perspective of the young man in *Youth* predates the experiences of Philipp and Keetenheuve in the post-war trilogy. He has yet to experience their feelings of impotence, their sense of being trapped on the stage of history. When he leaves his hometown, however, he does indeed find it more difficult to locate such an Archimedean point, unable to find a basis for a career in either directing or acting. The metropolis is a more complex place than his hometown. While this text illustrates all the typical role-playing that one might expect of a Koeppen protagonist, its function within the trajectory of Koeppen's work being told here is to ground the formative significance of pre-1933 Berlin. Whereas the texts before and after *Youth* play off the difference between that Berlin and the disciplined post-war Berlin, here Koeppen summons up some archetypal images of Berlin between the wars that owe as much to literary, artistic and cinematic depictions of the city as to any notional 'recollection' around which the text is structured:

⁸ The implications of this invocation of 'fatherland' for the presentation of nation in Koeppen's post-war texts are considered in Chapter Five of my monograph, *Negotiating Positions*.

It was snowing. Berlin lay covered in snow. The Empire lay in snow. The Stettin Station was a cavern of wind and soot and the sounds of grand movement. It was Babylon; a place to leave behind. I liked the taste of the air. I chewed freedom. They stood on every street corner, stood leant against the walls, they froze, they went hungry, they were unemployed, disqualified, homeless, they were the revolution. [...] The police came. They jumped down from the green car. They swarmed about. There were whistles. The policemen raised their truncheons. They drove us apart. I ran with the others.

My heart quivered. It beat fast. This was it now, I had found it, what I wanted to show, the moral institution, the unfettered theatre [...]. I staged the drama *Masses and Man* by Ernst Toller against a sublime, dark backdrop. The Schlesian Station too was a hollow cavern of wind and soot and noise. It was not Babylon. It was a hell for the poor, who had nowhere else to go.

Es schneite. Berlin lag im Schnee. Das Reich lag im Schnee. Der Stettiner Bahnhof war eine Höhle aus Wind und Ruß und den Geräuschen großer Bewegung. Es war Babylon; ein Ort, um aufzubrechen. Mir schmeckte die Luft. Ich kaute Freiheit. Sie standen auf allen Straßen, sie standen gegen die Mauern gelehnt, sie froren, sie hungerten, sie waren Arbeitslose, Ausgesteuerte, ohne Obdach, sie waren die Revolution. [...] Es kam Polizei. Die Schupos sprangen vom Deck ihrer grünen Wagen. Sie schwärmten aus. Piffe gellten. Die Polizisten hoben ihre Knüppel. Sie zerstreuten uns. Ich rannte mit den anderen.

Mein Herz bebt. Es schlug hoch. Das war es nun, ich hatte es gefunden, das wollte ich zeigen, die moralische Anstalt, das entfesselte Theater [...] Ich stellte das Drama *Masse Mensch* von Ernst Toller in erhabene, düstere Kulissen. Auch der Schlesische Bahnhof war eine Höhle aus Wind und Ruß und Gekreis. Es war nicht Babylon. Es war eine Hölle der Armen, die nicht wußten, wohin. (GS III, 91)

This brief section illustrates the young man's education about the city, not as a mythical Babylon, but as a place of real poverty, but this education is tempered by the fact that it is still (transformed into) an aesthetic performance. *Youth* passes briefly through Berlin, but another text that Koeppen apparently worked on throughout the 1970s, the unfinished novel, *Into the Dust with All the Enemies of Brandenburg* (*In Staub mit allen Feinden Brandenburgs*) is set more

firmly there. One excerpt, which was first published in 1978 under the title ‘A Beginning an End’ (‘Ein Anfang ein Ende’), tells another story of a different young boy growing up in the early thirties in and around Berlin, and gives us a sense of the context in which other fragments of that project, which I shall examine in more detail, are to be read.

Berlin and (Literary) Sites of Memory

One such fragment is the piece ‘Tiergarten’, referring to a large green space at the heart of Berlin. Here Koeppen reuses the model of ‘A Coffeehouse’ to tell the history of a location, albeit from a much longer perspective on this occasion. Koeppen establishes the Tiergarten as ‘a forest, a swamp region on the Spree, a beaver settlement’ (‘ein Wald, ein Sumpfgebiet an der Spree, eine Bibersiedlung’),⁹ it is the development of nature (‘islands formed in the stream, extended themselves’, T, 549) that leads to the arrival of ‘fishermen and sailors’, and with human intervention (reclaiming the land), we see settlement, the arrival of ‘merchants’ and the establishment of a feudal social order. It is the nobility which now clearly becomes the active agent in the space, as Koeppen provides a series of verbs to describe their engagement with and production of the space (‘protected, dominated, assisted and exerted pressure, established guards, an army, organized, built earldoms’; ‘schirmte, herrschte, förderte und drückte, stellte Wachen auf, ein Heer, rodete, exerzierte, richtete aus, baute Markgrafen’, T, 549). Ultimately, but still within the same sentence, ‘the forest became a game park’; Prussia’s ‘strict social order’ is mirrored in the built environment, ‘the broad road to Charlottenburg, did he desire parades, goosesteps and flags?’ (‘die breite Straße nach Charlottenburg, wünschte er Paraden, Stehschritt und Fahnen?’, T, 549), already betraying a post-National Socialist awareness of history on the part of the narrator. As with ‘Romanic Café’, the ruler (here Frederick the Great) orders his architect (Knobelsdorff) to produce representative space (‘a Versailles’), but also

⁹ Wolfgang Koeppen, ‘Tiergarten’, in *Auf dem Phantasieross* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 549-552, 549. All subsequent references to this text appear as T.

to create a Romantic ideal of nature in the Tierpark with its 'Rousseauinsel' (T, 549). In line with the political dimension of Romanticism which informs Koeppen's invocation of the period in *Into the Dust with All the Enemies of Brandenburg*, we now see the rise of a politicized bourgeoisie in Berlin, again linked to the spaces and spatial development of the city: 'Unrest came into the city, passionate spirits discussed in the avenues, a bohemian scene was formed, a great city arose' ('Unruhe kam in die Stadt, Schwarmgeister diskutierten in den Alleen, Boheme bildete sich, eine Großstadt entstand', T, 549). This is reflected in the spatial order of the city: 'the court barouches made way for the traffic order of the coaches of the bankers and factory owners' ('die Kaleschen des Hofes fügten sich der Verkehrsordnung der Kutschen der Bankiers und der Fabrikanten', T, 550). The technocratic bourgeoisie, figured in Koeppen's narrative by the 'moneymen' 'Herrn Bleichröder', conjoin with the aristocracy to give the Tiergarten 'its final, bourgeois, definition' (T, 550).

The Tiergarten, the second, and concluding paragraph tells us, was never a public park ('Volkspark'). The sentences are now shorter, as the narrator, again as in the model of 'Romanic Café', now enters the story as a schoolchild, subjected to the tales of his schoolteacher's visit to the Imperial capital and receiving a counter version from his architect uncle, Theodor, who calls the Siegesallee 'a merely decorative piece of work' ('eines Zuckerbäckers Werk', T, 551). The schoolchild, now a student in Berlin, views the avenue for the first time and finds it boring, reading the city monuments as a literary *lieu de memoire* through his recollections of Heinrich Mann's *Man of Straw* (*Der Untertan*, 1918). He recalls that Liebknecht and Luxemburg had been murdered in the Tiergarten, their bodies thrown into the Landwehrkanal. He observes the noble houses, 'somewhat shabby in their facades' ('etwas verfallen im Verputz', T, 551), with their social-spatial order for admission; he rents a furnished room, and sees the statue of Bismarck on his wobbly pedestal. This second paragraph concludes with Noske and Ebert followed by a watchful von Seeckt. 'When he set them in the saddle, he had won' ('Als er sie in den Sattel setzte, hatte er gewonnen', T, 552).

According to Pierre Nora, almost anything can be a 'site of memory': a history book or a memoir of the Tour de France, anywhere where 'memory crystallizes and secretes itself'.¹⁰ That memory studies have been so concerned with material places is perhaps due to the apparent ease with which, as Brian Ladd rather poetically suggests, 'memories often cleave to the physical settings of events'.¹¹ Wolfgang Koeppen's heightened literary anamnesis means that his texts, from 1934's *A Sad Affair* (*Eine unglückliche Liebe*) onwards, often read like patchworks of quotations that tickle the literary memory muscle and flatter the ego of the well-read reader. I think it is productive to think of these quotations as referring to literary texts as 'sites of memory', creating a coherent lineage of the literary and cultural tradition into which Koeppen's texts are embedded, and which is staged here with the reference to Mann's *Man of Straw*. The short text 'Tiergarten' thus refers to a topographical location in Berlin and is a history/memory of that site (objective to subjective), but also refers to a 'topographical text', a section in Walter Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood Around 1900* (*Berliner Kindheit um 1900*, 1940). That text situates the autobiographical persona in the context of Benjamin's analysis of the Wilhelminian bourgeoisie, and it is to the gentrification of the natural space of the Tiergarten that Koeppen's narrative leads, all the way from wilderness to this display of the political order that will lead ultimately to the National Socialist dictatorship, already foreshadowed in the reference to Speer's architecture of domination.

'Tiergarten' remains in the period that is maintained (until its final section) by *Youth*, and does not invoke the back and forth between past and present that we see in other Koeppen texts from the late period of his career. The text 'Dawn' ('Morgenrot'), subtitled 'Beginning of a Tale', does engage in this mixing of time/space coordinates, but also begins in Munich, and only towards the end do we suddenly find the narrator in a room with day breaking through 'thin curtains,

¹⁰ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoires*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7-24.

¹¹ Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1997), 1.

printed with a modern pattern' (GS III, 264), and the narrator looking out at a landscape that he has not seen before. We learn that he is in Berlin, 'but how should I believe it, when I stood in the open air, in front of a grand nature, wide open and unprotected from everything' ('aber wie sollte ich es glauben, wenn ich im Freien stand, vor einer großen Natur, schutzlos allem ausgeliefert', GS III, 264). This narrator clearly equates Berlin with an urbanity that is strongly contrasted with nature (though this nature is the Wannsee, as we later learn); this narrator does not like 'excursions from a city that had been my great adventure' ('Ausflüge aus einer Stadt, die mein großer Ausflug gewesen war', GS III, 264). The usual biography is established: he left Berlin, 'then it had undergone its downfall' ('dann war es untergegangen', GS III, 264), and the typically unrecoverable past is established through the interplay of space and time: 'the place which one leaves, does not stand still in time, but becomes more distant, hurries away in the other direction, one can never retrieve the city from which one came' ('der Ort, den man verläßt, nicht stehenbleibt in der Zeit, auch er entfernt sich, enteilt in die andere Richtung, nie kann man wiederfinden die Stadt, aus der man kam', GS III, 264). As in earlier texts, the post-war changes in the city are noted, with a nod towards a Proustian recovery of spatial practice: 'I knew the city, I had lived here, on every corner lay the lost time, but rebuilt by others for whom I had made way' ('Ich kannte die Stadt, ich hatte hier gelebt, an jeder Ecke lag die verlorene Zeit, doch umbaut von anderen, denen ich Platz gemacht hatte', GS III, 264).

In typical Koeppen fashion, the narrator celebrates the potential of the in-between space, the 'non-place' of the airports, which he likes to visit: 'One sits amidst great possibilities. The world is a pleasure. Even time can be twisted and turned' ('Man sitzt inmitten großer Möglichkeiten. Die Welt ist ein Vergnügen. Selbst an der Zeit läßt sich drehen', GS III, 264). The liminal space allows for negotiation with both space and time: 'I can choose: in New York for night, in Siberia for dawn' ('Ich kann wählen: in New York die Nacht, in Sibirien das Morgenrot', GS III, 265).

As in Koeppen's post-war novels, however, there is no escape from history, only a negotiation via the liminal space, and his journey via the urban railway leads him through a city he does not recognize:

They had cut broad urban clearways through the city, where the bombs, or Hitler's architect, had done their preparation [...]. [T]hese were connecting routes, not in my sense, however, no boulevard, no coffeehouse, petrol stations where with the petrol one sold lemonade, poisonously coloured fizzy stuff, one drank in the neon light, treated ulcers, out of rubble, destruction, piles of rubbish, allotments high tower blocks raised their heads, there were illuminated dead windows [...] in all spaces the artificial light, no-one is there, no-one awaits you, you stray through the corridors [...].

Sie hatten breite Schnellstraßen in die Stadt geschnitten, wo die Bomben vorgearbeitet hatten oder Hitlers Architekt [...]. [E]s waren Verbindungswege, nicht in meinem Sinn, kein Boulevard, kein Kaffeehaus, Tankstellen, wo man zum Benzin Limonade ausschenkte, giftfarbene Sprudel, man soff das Neonlicht, pflegte Geschwüre, aus Schutt, Zerstörungen, Müllfeldern, Schrebergärten ragten hohe Blöcke auf, erleuchtete tote Fenster [...] in allen Räumen das künstliche Licht, niemand ist da, keiner erwartet dich, du irrst durch die Gänge [...]. (GS III, 266)

This is an archetypal modernist critique of the empty homogeneous space of the modern city, the irony being that the older 'spatial practices of connection' to which Koeppen alludes – the boulevard and the coffeehouse – are also archetypal for the modern city (as constructed by Baron Haussmann, or analysed by Jürgen Habermas); it is just that the narrator remembers these as the 'lost' Berlin of the 1920s, which is also the location for his own 'lost' spatial practices.

The narrator then imagines a career as a speculator in the city, which comes to an end as he finds himself in a taxi back to the city. As he is driven along the Avus, he looks left: 'To my right, in shadow lay the forest, stood the pines, was sand, Fontane's Walks through the Brandenburg Marches' ('Rechts im Schatten lag Wald, standen die Kiefern, war der Sand, Fontanes Wanderungen in der Mark Brandenburg', GS III, 267). As in 'Tiergarten', the site of memory is as much a literary text as a material place.

The taxi brings the narrator to the Kurfürstendamm, and, as usual, the past and present intermingle in this specific location. He thinks of the good red Bordeaux at Mampe's, 'which the dead friends had drunk. I had not known the dead friends. I had stood outside and gazed through the window. When they committed suicide, I was not there' ('den die toten Freunde getrunken hatten. Ich hatte die toten Freunde nicht gekannt. Ich hatte draußen gestanden und durch das Fenster geblickt. Als sie sich umbrachten, war ich nicht da', GS III, 268). As elsewhere in the story, the narrator stylizes himself as an outsider in the past; in that sense, the idea of a 'past home' is doubly negated; it is irretrievable, and was not a home for the narrator in the first place.

The Platform, in and out of History

The short text 'Bless Our Exit, Our Entrance Also Bless' ('Unsern Ausgang segne, unsern Eingang gleichermaßen'), published in 1979 and also an excerpt from *Into the Dust with All the Enemies of Brandenburg*, is set in the post-war liminal city of Berlin. I want to look at some of the narrative strategies by which the text deals with the multiple boundaries which confront Koeppen's narrator, for not only are there two geographically-divided cities in one, but also the present city and the remembered capital from the 1930s. This text chooses the ideal arena for its meditation on identity and memory. Where *Youth's* spectating narrator was a passive observer and commentator, the narrator of this text is an active traveller. His position is established in the opening sentences of the story:

My first journey to the capital of the German Democratic Republic was undertaken on a Sunday. It was a Sunday before Christmas. The sky above Berlin was boundlessly grey. Perhaps snow, perhaps rain, the grand Advent.

Meine erste Reise in die Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik unternahm ich an einem Sonntag. Es war ein Sonntag vor Weihnachten. Der Himmel über Berlin war grenzenlos grau. Vielleicht Schnee, vielleicht Regen, der große Advent. (GS III, 297)

This opening allows us to connect this story to another fragment of prose from the Brandenburg project, 'Advent', published in Koeppen's posthumous volume *On the Horse of Fantasy (Auf dem Phantasieross, 2000)*. It traces a narrator's recollections of an Advent Sunday in Berlin shortly after 1933 (SA-men are carrying collecting boxes 'for the Führer, for the future), which then carry over into a present-day narration set 'in Berlin, divided by the Wall, in old cowed Brandenburg' ('im mauergetrennten Berlin, im alten geduckten Brandenburg'),¹² where the protagonist relates a search for Kleist's grave that had ended at a railway station, 'the terminal destination of lines, which only led back into the past, guilt, failure, loss' ('die Endstation von Gleisen, die nur zurückführten, in die Vergangenheit, die Schuld, das Versäumnis, das Verlorene'),¹³ presumably pointing towards the relationship between the location Wannsee, where the Final Solution was planned. That first text, which leaves the narrator on the urban railway travelling eastwards to Friedrichstraße Station, is not constricted by the boundaries of time, and neither is its published partner piece. The capacity to move across borders is already suggested by the boundless grey of the Berlin sky. As in *Youth*, time shifts are provoked by association, so that the mention of Advent sends the narrator back into mixed memories of a Wilhelmine childhood of Christmas trees, nuts and a benevolent authoritarianism. The second paragraph of the story enacts a time shift without actually shifting in location:

In the West I had taken part in an end of life sale. The Christmas markets were selling the oldest illusions. If I remember, I travelled with the urban railway to the Stock Exchange Station. Young years. The young man embarked, he disembarked. He fleetingly greeted the monument to Schlemihl, or Schlemihl's father. The urban railway stops now at Friedrichstraße Station, and the Stock Market, I heard, no longer exists.

Ich hatte im Westen an einem Lebensschlußverkauf teilgenommen. Die Weihnachtsmärkte handelten die ältesten Illusionen. Wenn ich mich erinnerte, reiste ich mit der Stadtbahn zum Bahnhof Börse.

¹² Koeppen, *Auf dem Phantasieross*, 547.

¹³ Koeppen, *Auf dem Phantasieross*, 547.

Junge Jahre. Der junge Mann stieg ein, er stieg aus. Er grüßte flüchtig das Denkmal des Schlemihl oder des Schlemihls Vater. Die Stadtbahn endet nun schon am Bahnhof Friedrichstraße, und die Börse, hörte ich, gibt es nicht mehr. (GS III, 297-98)

With the introduction of the present tense, there is the incontrovertible difference of the historical present (of 1979): the train now stops at Friedrichstraße, the Stock Exchange is no longer there. While these are fairly banal observations, there are more subtle aspects to this passage which reflect on the processes of memory and identity, such as the remarkable phrase 'Lebensschlußverkauf' (an 'end-of-life sale') and the 'oldest illusions' which could well be read as a critique, reminding us of the dangers of a sepia-tinted, senile nostalgia. The reference to 'Schlemihl, or Schlemihl's father' has at least two connotations for the text. First it suggests the close relationship between fictional characters and their authors. Second, Chamisso's story of Peter Schlemihl concerns a man who lost his shadow and went on a journey around the world. The relevance of this story for a narrator in search of his lost self is undeniable.

The text then turns its attention to the physical border which cuts across Berlin. The narrator imagines in great detail what it would be like to cross the border in a tourist bus as 'ein doppelt Fremder, hinter Glas, jeder Wirklichkeit entlaufen' ('a foreigner twice over, set behind glass, distanced from any reality', GS III, 298). As with all of Koeppen's travellers, this narrator does not want to emphasize his tourist-spectator status, and rather than maintaining his distance, he seeks to enjoy that solitude in the crowd. On the one hand, his destination is a personal one – to visit the Pergamon Altar 'at which my uncle died' ('an dem mein Onkel gestorben war', GS III, 298). On the other hand, he wants to mix with the local inhabitants, and so travels with the urban railway.

But I travelled with the urban railways. [...] In the history to which time petrifies, today again, now, in an instant, the time in which I live, this is an historical moment, for me, par excellence, a border-crossing of a particular kind. The red house of the Charité hospital, death, over, over, I do not know wherefrom and whereto, and there

they speak and write of worlds in competition with one another [...].

Ich reiste aber mit der Stadtbahn. [...] In der Geschichte, zu der die Zeit versteint, heute wieder, jetzt, im Nu, die Zeit, in der ich lebe, ist dies ein historischer Augenblick, für mich, par excellence, ein Grenzübertritt besonderer Art. Das rote Haus der Charité, der Tod, vorbei, vorbei, ich weiß nicht woher und wohin, da sprechen und schreiben sie von miteinander konkurrierenden Welten [...]. (GS III, 298)

In its short breathless phrases the text tries to capture the moment of presence, the moment at which the 'I' is alive in the present tense, the moment of a 'special kind' of 'border-crossing' before time becomes history again. Where Friedrich merely crossed the border into his 'alien and familiar' environment, the narrators of the late texts attempt to capture the moment of *being* between-states. Once the moment has passed ('over, over'), the sight of the Charité hospital on the eastern side of the border is equated with the return of history, of petrification ('versteint') and death.

Although the previous excerpt would seem to suggest that the narrator has crossed the border, we in fact discover that he is standing on the platform at Bellevue Castle, waiting for the urban railway and observing the station attendant. Indeed, we have now had two imaginary border-crossings, but the text has not actually progressed beyond its opening sentences:

I spoke to Sonja, asked advice of Sonja, whom I called Sonja after Dostoyevsky and Raskolnikov [...], Sonja on the platform of Bellevue Station, at the mercy of my gaze and my dreams, [...] Sonja [...] with a red Soviet military cap over the boyish haircut of a young girl who like girls, Sonja, who carried out in cheeky fashion what once serious royal Prussian officials had carried out in earnest fashion, sending trains in east and west directions, unpolitical when she took off the clothes of the State once work was over and was perhaps naked, only a girl from Berlin [...]. Yet on the platform Sonja held the rod of command in her fur-gloved hand and could the rod of command not have been the marshal staff for Sonja with her Russian and Prussian director's cap? In a brain tortured by history the Convention of Tauroggen. German

and Russian generals against Napoleon. Did Napoleon denote the West?

Ich sprach Sonja an, fragte Sonja um Rat, die ich Sonja nannte, nach Dostojewski und Raskolnikow, den erhebenden Mustern falschen Verhaltens, Sonja auf dem Perron des Bahnhofs Bellevue meiner Beobachtung und meinen Träumen ausgesetzt, [...] Sonja [...] mit einer roten Mütze sowjetisch militärischen Schnitts auf dem bubenhaft geschorenen Haar eines Mädchens, das Mädchen mag, Sonja, die mürrisch tat, was einmal ernste königlich preußische Beamte ernst vollzogen hatten, Züge abfahren zu lassen nach West und Ost, Sonja von der Reichsbahn eingestellt und eingekleidet und wohnhaft in Berlin West, unpolitisch, wenn sie den Staat auszog nach dem Dienst und vielleicht nackt war, nur eine Berlinerinnen [...]. Doch auf dem Bahnsteig hielt Sonja den Befehlsstab in der pelzbehandschuhten Hand, und hätte der Befehlsstab nicht der Marschallstab sein können für Sonja mit der russischen und preußischen Vorstandsmütze? Im historisch gequälten Gehirn die Konvention von Tauroggen. Deutsche und russische Generäle gegen Napoleon. War Bonaparte der Westen? (GS III, 299-300)

The railway platform at Bellevue Castle, ostensibly an ultra-administered space of the Cold War world, is transformed by Koeppen's narrator into a space for dreams and invention. The narrator stresses the fact that Sonja's name is one he has given to her, a name derived from literature (again, as with the reference to Peter Schlemihl, the text plays with the conflation of author and protagonist).¹⁴ Nor does he attempt to conceal the fact that he is imposing his inventions upon her: on the platform she is opened up by the male gaze to demonstrate the complexities and ironies of German history. Sonja is androgynous, possibly lesbian, and divided too in the sense that she works for the East, but lives in the West. There is a sense of erotic play (and possibly subversion of the 'serious Prussian officials') in the phallic 'rod of command' which she holds in her 'fur-gloved' hand.

¹⁴ In an ostensibly comic interlude in *The Hothouse*, another novel indebted to *Crime and Punishment*, we are told that Keetenheuve has a former girlfriend by the name of Sonja Busen (Sonja Bust!), whose sexual demands Keetenheuve tries to deflect by suggesting they read the works of Marx together (GS II, 303).

Hers is not the mind ‘tortured by history’, however: that is the privilege of the narrator. On the railway platform, historical past and present are conjoined in the image of Sonja: she recalls Prussia but also Soviet Russia, and even further back to the convention of Tauroggen. This was concluded on 30th December 1812, when the Prussian rebellion against Napoleon began (thus presumably aiding the Russian army). Thus the question of East and West is further complicated: does Napoleon represent Western Enlightenment or just another form of repression? Where does Prussia stand? Sonja, with her ambivalent sexuality, uniform and national identity, can also be seen as a projection of the confusion of German identities which are present in the narrator, with his memories of Masuria and Weimar Berlin, and his current status as a citizen of the Federal Republic.¹⁵

The railway platform is an imaginative environment in which past and present can be kaleidoscopically refracted. The narrator’s arrival in the East is a nightmarish daydream about losing his day-pass (and therefore the assurance of his identity), and being on the run from the authorities, hoping ‘to find the back door, the mouse hole which is after all everywhere’ (‘die Hintertür zu finden, das Mäuseloch, das es schließlich überall gibt’, GS III, 302). He does find an exit:

Where was the narrow gate here? With those who had come with presents for long-lost relatives, I went down over grey concrete steps into a narrow shaft.

Wo war die enge Pforte hier? Ich stieg mit ihnen, die gekommen waren, fremd gewordene Verwandte zu beschenken, über graue Betonstufen in einen engen Schacht hinab. (GS III, 302)

Koeppen’s sentences walk a tightrope between the concrete situation (the arrival of West Berliners at Christmas with presents for their relatives in the GDR) and the metaphorical resonances of the situation for his narrator. His own ‘long-lost

¹⁵ The reference to Tauroggen and the Prussian rebellion might well explain the significance of the references to Chamisso, who wrote *Peter Schlemihl* (*Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*) in August/September 1813, while living in Kunersdorf in Oderbruch, where he had retreated during the popular uprising against the Napoleonic occupying forces.

relative' ('fremd gewordene Verwandter') is his Weimar self. At the same time, the narrow tunnel reverses the conclusion of Koeppen's earlier Berlin text, 'A Coffeehouse', where he came out of the underground shaft to witness the destruction of the city. For the narrator of 'Bless Our Exit', the only exit out of the liminal space where history and identity are fragmentary and fragile is disappearance into a narrow tunnel. It is death.

Conclusion: 'Thirdspaces' of the Self

The 'secret fatherland' of 'A Coffeehouse' is the enigmatic 'collective' which is present throughout the latter part of Koeppen's post-war career, the site of memory where the personal identity of the self and a broader collective are conjoined. It is not a lost organic community, but the memory of the cosmopolitan, yet German, modern metropolis that was pre-1933 Berlin, imagined after its death. The tendency of modernity towards homogenization, already identified by the likes of Kracauer at the time, is not part of that memory, but is rather identified in the rebuilding and reorganization of the city in the post-war era. Berlin becomes a site of the literary self through the ways in which literature can cut across time and space in its forms of representation. It is striking that Koeppen seeks the 'in-between spaces' of the city to locate that literary self: the interstitial spaces of the urban environment seem to provide a place for re-writing the prescriptions of the subject imposed by objective culture and space. Koeppen's literary memorialization gives concrete form to Karen Till's rather literary observation that

[places] are fluid mosaics and moments of memory, matter, metaphor, scene and experience that create and mediate social spaces and temporalities. Through place making, people mark social spaces as haunted sites where they can return, make contact with their loss, contain unwanted presences or confront past injustices.¹⁶

¹⁶ Karen Till, *New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005), 8.

If we look to theoretical perspectives, rather than such poetic positions to elucidate Koeppen's interstitial space, then the work of Edward Soja on 'Thirdspace' seems most apposite. Soja defines 'Thirdspace' as a 'real-and-imaged' space, a space 'other' that undermines and deconstructs ossified polarizations by introducing 'a critical "other-than" that speaks and critiques through its otherness'.¹⁷

¹⁷ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imaged Places* (Cambridge: Blackwells, 1996), 61.